

The support programs that used to be in place for the lower income and middle class have been cut by Washington. And these cuts shift more risk and burden to those we ought to be helping the most. The reality is that as they become weaker and more vulnerable, so does the nation.

Washington cut Pell Grant Scholarship Aid in 2005, in the face of obvious demands for a better educated workforce. In North Carolina, we had to find the money to pay for it.

We cannot wait on Washington. In 2001, North Carolina passed a Patient's Bill of Rights. Washington is still talking about it.

This year our state had to increase the minimum wage to be fair to workers. It ought to be done nationally, but Washington prefers the political football to the people's solution.

And almost 60 percent of North Carolina's budget is education. So every dollar I use to replace a federal cut potentially takes money away from the classroom. I, along with most others, feel compelled to replace federal cuts to health care, foster care, emergency heating assistance so many programs critical to the "weak and needy" have not been there to help the weak grow strong.

And the coup de grace...when 5,000 North Carolina National Guard soldiers were sent to Iraq, they arrived to find that Washington had not provided the equipment they needed and expected to accomplish their mission. More of our North Carolina Guard have been deployed overseas than from virtually any other state.

The commanding general called me, and our state ordered and shipped the equipment they needed, were promised and did not receive, when it was time to fight.

The Secretary of Defense's hollow response, "Well, you go to war with the Army you have" is inconsistent with our values. You create a budget to meet the needs of the war effort. You do not design the war effort to fit the needs of the budget.

This country was made great not by words of hubris but by courageous deeds. It has been made greater by sacrifice, not by greed. As each generation has sacrificed so the next might prosper, our generation can do no less.

And in a post 9/11 world, it is absolutely essential that we build a stronger America, one that can provide more security, exert more influence, and create more and better alliances in the world.

Washington is not short on words, just action. The vision broadcast from the banks of the Potomac lacks the passion, courage and commitment to create the plan, execute the strategy and commit the resources to get the job done.

Whether America is fighting in the global marketplace or on a foreign battlefield, our students and soldiers alike must be given the tools they need to compete and win, or else we will fail.

The fight for American values is not only in the mountains of Afghanistan or in the deserts of Iraq. Our American values are embedded in the integrity of our institutions, in the fairness of our policies, and in the character of our people. Our moral values must be evident in American policy more now than ever before.